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Friday's Feature

By

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Prepare your landscape now for future tropical storms

Hurricane season is here and many people are busy preparing their homes for the potential of a powerful storm. But have you given any thought about preparing your landscape for a hurricane?

We know from past experience that falling trees and flying landscape debris during a storm can cause a lot of damage. Now is the time to evaluate your landscape for potential hazards and do something about it. Pruning or removing trees once a hurricane watch has been announced is risky and tree trimming debris left along the street is hazardous.

Now is a good time to remove dead or dying trees, to prune decayed or dead branches and to stake newly planted trees. Also inspect your trees for signs of disease or insect infestation that may further weaken them and treat those conditions appropriately.

While you may be able to take care of the smaller jobs yourself, professional help sometimes is your best option. Unhealthy trees are predisposed to hurricane damage. When they are located near the home, property damage could be reduced by having a professional arborist evaluate the trees to assess risk and treat problems.

Hiring a certified arborist can be a worthwhile investment. To find a certified arborist in your area contact the International Society of Arboriculture (ISA) at 217-355-9411 or online at www.isa-arbor.com. You may also contact the Florida Chapter of ISA at 941-342-0153 or online at www.floridaisa.org.

An assessment is especially important if you have tree species that are known to have poor wind resistance. You may want to consider removing trees that have low wind resistance, are at the end of their life span and have the potential to endanger lives or property. For example, laurel oaks are relatively short-lived, living only about 50 years, and they tend to lose their strength and stability faster than most other oaks. They have low wind resistance and also have the awful combination of both brittle wood and a shallow root system. If you have a big, old laurel oak within falling distance of your home, you may want to consider removing it before the next storm.

Tree species in our area with the lowest wind resistance include pecan, tulip poplar, Carolina laurelcherry, Bradford pear, southern red oak, laurel oak, water oak, Chinese tallow, Chinese elm, southern red cedar, Leyland cypress, sand pine and spruce pine.

It's also very important to critically evaluate your landscape pines. Pines can be very sensitive to wind damage. They can snap, uproot or lean during high wind situations.

Pine species vary in their wind resistance, usually with longleaf and slash pines showing better survival rates than loblolly and sand pine. However, when pines get big and tall, regardless of the species, they may cause a

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lot of damage, specifically if located close to homes or other valuable structures. Large pines for this reason are classified as having medium to poor wind-resistance. This doesn't mean that pines should not be planted. They should be planted away from structures in more open areas.

If you decide to remove a hazardous tree, consider replacing it with a better tree. Trees are valuable in the landscape. They can even deflect wind and help to protect our homes and structures from damage if they are well chosen, well placed and maintained. Choose trees that are known to be wind resistant. Plant a diversity of species, ages and layers. Use high quality trees with good structure. And once planted, be sure to develop good cultural practices.

Theresa Friday is the Residential Horticulture Extension Agent for Santa Rosa County. The use of trade names, if used in this article, is solely for the purpose of providing specific information. It is not a guarantee, warranty, or endorsement of the product name(s) and does not signify that they are approved to the exclusion of others. For additional information about all of the county extension services and other articles of interest go to: <http://www.santarosa.fl.gov/extension>